

COMPLETE ARCS ARISING FROM A GENERALIZATION OF THE HERMITIAN CURVE

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ABSTRACT. We investigate complete arcs of degree greater than two, in projective planes over finite fields, arising from the set of rational points of a generalization of the Hermitian curve. The degree of the arcs is closely related to the number of rational points of a class of Artin–Schreier curves which is calculated by using exponential sums via Coulter’s approach. We also single out some examples of maximal curves.

1. INTRODUCTION

Let \mathbb{F}_q and $PG(2, q)$ denote the finite field of order q and the projective plane over \mathbb{F}_q , respectively. A pointset $\mathcal{K} \subseteq PG(2, q)$ of size N is called an *arc of degree d* or, simply, an (N, d) -arc if no line of $PG(2, q)$ meets \mathcal{K} in more than d points. The (N, d) -arc \mathcal{K} is called *complete* if it is not contained in an $(N + 1, d)$ -arc; that is, if for every point $P \in PG(2, q) \setminus \mathcal{K}$ there is a line through P meeting \mathcal{K} in exactly d points. A basic problem in Finite Geometry is the existence and uniqueness of complete arcs. For basic facts on these objects, the reader is referred to the book [14] by Hirschfeld.

Throughout this paper by a *plane curve* we shall mean a projective, geometrically irreducible plane curve. Let \mathcal{X} be a plane curve of degree d defined over \mathbb{F}_q . The set of the \mathbb{F}_q -rational points of \mathcal{X} in $PG(2, q)$, denoted by $\mathcal{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)$, is a natural example of an (N, d) -arc with $N = \#\mathcal{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)$ (Bézout’s Theorem). The problem of the completeness of $\mathcal{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)$ as an (N, d) -arc was raised by Hirschfeld and Voloch in 1988 [16]. For instance, if \mathcal{X} is a conic in odd characteristic or the Hermitian curve, namely the plane curve defined by the affine equation $y^{q+1} = x^q + x$ over \mathbb{F}_{q^2} , then the set of rational points of such a curve is an example of a complete arc; see for example [14, Lemma 7.20, Ch. 8]. A generalization of the Hermitian curve is given by an \mathbb{F}_q -Frobenius nonclassical plane curve; that is, a plane curve over \mathbb{F}_q such that the \mathbb{F}_q -Frobenius map takes each nonsingular point of the curve to the tangent line at that point (cf. [13]). Such curves are usually equipped with a large number of rational points (loc. cit.) so that one can expect to

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handled examples of complete arcs of large size compared with their degrees. Recently Giulietti et al. [12] and Borges [1] studied the set of \mathbb{F}_q -rational points of further examples of \mathbb{F}_q -Frobenius nonclassical plane curves that also give rise to complete arcs. For background on curves over finite fields we refer to the book [15].

Any (N, d) -arc arising from a plane curve gives rise to an algebraic geometry (AG) code with parameters $[N, 3, N - d']$, $d' \leq d$; see, for example, [22, Sect. 3.1.1]. Here, if the arc is complete, the corresponding code has minimum distance equal to $N - d$ and it cannot be extended to a code with larger minimum distance. This is analogous to the well known relation between complete $(N, 2)$ -arcs and non-extendable MDS codes (loc. cit.).

In this article we investigate (N, d) -arcs derived from the set of rational points of a Frobenius nonclassical curve introduced by Borges and Conceição in [2] (see Section 2 here) and which is a natural generalization of a Hermitian curve. Our main result is Theorem 5.4. The computation of the degree of the corresponding arcs is closely related to the study of rational points of a class of Artin-Schreier curves, see (2.2); here Coulter's approach [5],[6],[7],[8] is used. By taking advantage of the aforementioned computation regarding rational points, we slightly extend some results of Wolfmann [23] and Coulter [8] by pointing out some examples of maximal curves of Artin-Schreier type; see Theorem 4.1.

2. THE CURVE \mathcal{H}

Let q be a power of a prime p . Let ℓ be an integer with $\ell \geq 2$ and define $r = r(\ell)$ as the smallest integer $r \geq \ell/2$ such that $\gcd(\ell, r) = 1$; that is,

$$(2.1) \quad r = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } \ell = 2 \\ \ell/2 + 1, & \text{if } \ell \equiv 0 \pmod{4} \\ \ell/2 + 2, & \text{if } \ell \geq 6, \ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4} \\ (\ell + 1)/2, & \text{if } \ell \text{ is odd.} \end{cases}$$

For a symbol z , set

$$\mathbf{T}(z) := z^{q^{\ell-1}} + z^{q^{\ell-2}} + \cdots + z.$$

In particular, $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ denotes the trace map from \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} to \mathbb{F}_q . In [2] the plane curve \mathcal{H} defined by the affine equation

$$\mathbf{T}(y) = \mathbf{T}(x^{q^r+1}) \pmod{x^{q^\ell} - x}$$

over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} was considered. The main properties of this curve are listed below.

Theorem 2.1. ([2]) *Let ℓ and r be as above. Suppose $p > 2$ if $\ell = 2$. The curve \mathcal{H} has degree $q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1}$, genus $q^r(q^{\ell-1} - 1)/2$ and its number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ is $q^{2\ell-1} + 1$. It has just one point at infinity of projective coordinates $(X : Y : Z) = (0 : 1 : 0)$ which is also its only singular point whenever $\ell \geq 3$. Furthermore, the curve is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -Frobenius nonclassical.*

Notice that the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of the nonsingular model of \mathcal{H} is also $q^{2\ell-1} + 1$ (loc. cit.). If $p > 2$ and $\ell = 2$, then it is clear that \mathcal{H} is the Hermitian curve and thus $\mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^2})$ is a well known complete $(q^3 + 1, q + 1)$ -arc. Here we focus on the more complicated case $\ell \geq 3$.

Remark 2.2. In [10], Garcia and Stichtenoth considered the plane curve \mathcal{C} defined by the affine equation

$$y^{q^{\ell-1}} + \dots + y^q + y = x^{q^{\ell-1} + q^{\ell-2}} + \dots + x^{q+1}$$

over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} with $\ell \geq 2$; see also [3, 17, 18]. This curve has degree $q^{\ell-1} + q^{\ell-2}$, genus $q^{\ell-1}(q^{\ell-1} - 1)/2$ and $q^{2\ell-1} + 1$ \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points in $PG(2, \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$. The nonsingular model of \mathcal{C} also has $q^{2\ell-1} + 1$ rational points over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} (loc. cit.).

For $\ell = 2$ and $p > 2$ both plane curves \mathcal{C} and \mathcal{H} are the Hermitian curve. For $\ell = 3$, they define the same curve. For $\ell = 4$ and $\ell = 6$, their degrees, genus and numbers of rational points are the same. In general, the number of its rational points coincide; however, the degree and genus of \mathcal{H} are smaller than that of \mathcal{C} . In particular, the ratios (number of rational points)/degree and (number of rational points)/genus are better on the curve \mathcal{H} . Such rates are particularly important; for example, in the context of Finite Geometry or Coding Theory via AG codes; see, for example, [15].

As mentioned in the Introduction, the main goal of this paper is the study of the arc $\mathcal{K} := \mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$ in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ arising from the set of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of the plane curve \mathcal{H} (see Section 5). To deal with the parameters of \mathcal{K} , the Frobenius nonclassicality property of \mathcal{H} is not used. In fact, only the degree and the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of \mathcal{H} stated in Theorem 2.1 are used. The approach is the natural one: consider \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -lines $\mathcal{L} : y + bx + c = 0$ and count the number $M_\ell(b, c)$ of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of \mathcal{H} lying on \mathcal{L} . This number is related to the degree d of \mathcal{H} so that $M_\ell(b, c) \leq d$. Then $M_\ell(b, c)$ is equal to the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -solutions of the one variable equation

$$\mathbf{T}(x^{q^r+1} + bx + c) = 0$$

and thus it can be computed by means of the relation

$$(2.2) \quad N_\ell(b, c) = qM_\ell(b, c),$$

where $N_\ell(b, c)$ is the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of the Artin-Schreier curve of type

$$(2.3) \quad y^q - y = x^{q^r+1} + bx + c,$$

with r defined as in (2.1). Thus we are led to the problem of the computation of rational points on curves over finite fields of Artin-Schreier type. Such computations were already performed by several authors. For example, in 1989 Wolfmann [23] used quadratic forms to calculate the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of Artin-Schreier curves of type

$$y^q - y = ax^s + c,$$

where $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$, $c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, ℓ is even and s is a certain divisor of $q^\ell - 1$. Later on, in 2002, Coulter [8] used facts on exponential sums [5, 6, 7] to compute the number of \mathbb{F}_q -rational points on Artin-Schreier curves of type

$$(2.4) \quad y^{p^n} - y = ax^{p^\alpha+1} + L(x),$$

where $a \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$, $t := \gcd(n, e)$ divides $u := \gcd(\alpha, e)$, with $q = p^e$, and $L(x) \in \mathbb{F}_q[x]$ is a p^t -linearized polynomial. We recall that Wolfmann's and Coulter's results have some overlap but they are not equivalent.

3. THE NUMBER OF RATIONAL AFFINE POINTS OF A CLASS OF ARTIN-SCHREIER CURVES

Throughout this section let $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime p , and let ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$. By considering the curve (2.3) and by taking into account the type of the curve (2.4) studied by Coulter, we are led to compute the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of Artin-Schreier curves of type

$$y^q - y = ax^{q^r+1} + L(x) + c,$$

where $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$, $c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ and $L(x) = \sum_{i=0}^{\ell-1} b_i x^{q^i} \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}[x]$ is a q -linearized

polynomial. If we set $b := \sum_{i=0}^{\ell-1} b_i^{q^{\ell-i}}$, arguing as in [8, Thm. 5.8], then computing \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational affine points of curves as above is in fact equivalent to computing \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of Artin-Schreier curves of type

$$(3.1) \quad y^q - y = ax^{q^r+1} + bx + c,$$

where $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$, $b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$. This observation is useful in computing the degree of the arcs in Section 5.

Let $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ denote the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of the curve (3.1). By [8, Lemma 5.5] we have an exponential sum of type

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = \sum_{h \in \mathbb{F}_q} \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}} \chi_1(hax^{q^r+1} + hbx + hc),$$

where $\chi_1(x) = \exp(2\pi\sqrt{-1}\mathbf{t}(x)/p)$ is the canonical additive character of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} with $\mathbf{t} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_p$ being the absolute trace map. For $A, B, C \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ we consider the following Weil sum on \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} :

$$R_{\ell,r}(A, B, C) := \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}} \chi_1(Ax^{q^r+1} + Bx + C).$$

Thus

$$(3.2) \quad N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = \sum_{h \in \mathbb{F}_q} R_{\ell,r}(ha, hb, hc).$$

It turns out that $R_{\ell,r}(A, B, C) = R_{\ell,r}(A, B, 0)\chi_1(C)$, where the sum $R_{\ell,r}(A, B, 0)$ was computed by Coulter [5, 6, 7]. Its computation depends on properties of certain polynomials over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} such as those in Remark 3.1 below (see also Remark 5.2).

Remark 3.1. Let ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$. Suppose that ℓ/u is odd, where $u = \gcd(\ell, r)$. Let p be the characteristic of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . Let $\mathbf{T}_u : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_{q^u}$ be the trace map.

- (1) If $p = 2$, then $\gcd(q^r + 1, q^\ell - 1) = 1$ [7, Lemma 2.1] and thus x^{q^r+1} is a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} and hence over \mathbb{F}_q . Moreover, for $b \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ with $\mathbf{T}_u(b) = 1$, the equation $x^{q^{2r}} + x + 1 = b$ has a solution in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ; see the remark after the proof of Theorem 4.2 in [7].
- (2) If $p > 2$, then $f(x) = a^{q^r}x^{q^{2r}} + ax$ with $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ is also a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ; see the remark after Lemma 2.2 in [6].

From Theorems 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 in [8] we can compute now the sum $R_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ as follows.

Lemma 3.2. *Let $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime p . Let ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$. Set $u = \gcd(\ell, r)$. Let $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$. Let η_1 be the quadratic character of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} and χ_1 be the canonical additive character of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . Let $f(x) = a^{q^r}x^{q^{2r}} + ax$ (cf. Remark 3.1(2) above).*

(1) *Let ℓ/u be odd. Then*

$$R_{\ell,r}(a, 0, c) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } p = 2 \\ (-1)^{n\ell-1} q^{\ell/2} \eta_1(a) \chi_1(c), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4} \\ (-1)^{n\ell-1} (-1)^{n\ell/2} q^{\ell/2} \eta_1(a) \chi_1(c), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, \end{cases}$$

For $b \neq 0$, the following cases arise.

(i) If $p = 2$ and $h \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, then

$$R_{\ell,r}(ah, bh, ch) = R_{\ell,r}(h, ba_1^{-1}h, ch),$$

where $a_1 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ is the solution of $x^{q^r+1} = a$. Moreover, let $\mathbf{T}_u : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_{q^u}$ be the trace map. Then $R_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = 0$ provided that $\mathbf{T}_u(b) \neq 1$; otherwise, there is $w \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ such that $b = w^{q^{2r}} + w + 1$ and

$$R_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = \chi_1(w^{q^r+1} + w) \left(\frac{2}{\ell/u} \right)^{nu} q^{(\ell+u)/2} \chi_1(c),$$

where the Jacobi symbol $(\frac{2}{v})$ is defined by the formula

$$\left(\frac{2}{v} \right) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } v \equiv \pm 1 \pmod{8} \\ -1, & \text{if } v \equiv \pm 3 \pmod{8}. \end{cases}$$

(ii) If $p > 2$, then $R_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is given by

$$\begin{cases} (-1)^{n\ell-1} q^{\ell/2} \eta_1(-a) \overline{\chi_1(ax_0^{q^r+1})} \chi_1(c), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4} \\ (-1)^{n\ell-1} i^{3n\ell} q^{\ell/2} \eta_1(-a) \chi_1(ax_0^{q^r+1}) \chi_1(c), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, \end{cases}$$

where $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is the solution of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ and $i = \sqrt{-1}$.

(2) Let ℓ/u be even.

(i) If $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has no solution in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , then $R_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = 0$.

(ii) If $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} and $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is the solution of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$, then

$$R_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = (-1)^{\ell/2u} q^{\ell/2} \overline{\chi_1(ax_0^{q^r+1})} \chi_1(c).$$

(iii) If $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial but $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has a solution x_0 in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , then

$$R_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = (-1)^{\ell/2u+1} q^{\ell/2+u} \overline{\chi_1(ax_0^{q^r+1})} \chi_1(c).$$

Theorems 3.3, 3.5 and 3.6 compute $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$. We begin with the case $p = 2$ and ℓ/u odd; the final result is closely related to [8, Thm. 6.9].

Theorem 3.3. *Let*

- (a) $q = 2^n$;
- (b) ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$ such that ℓ/u is odd, where $u = \gcd(\ell, r)$;
- (c) $\mathbf{T}_u : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_{q^u}$ be the trace map;
- (d) $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$;
- (e) $a_1 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ be the solution of $x^{q^r+1} = a$.

Then $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = N_{\ell,r}(1, ba_1^{-1}, c)$. If $\mathbf{T}_u(b) \notin \mathbb{F}_q^*$, then $N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise,

$$N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = q^\ell + \chi_1(\omega^{q^r+1} + \omega) \left(\frac{2}{\ell/u} \right)^{nu} q^{(\ell+u)/2} \chi_1(\mathbf{T}_u(b)^{-2} c),$$

where $\omega \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is such that $b \mathbf{T}_u(b)^{-1} = \omega^{q^{2r}} + \omega + 1$, and $\left(\frac{2}{v}\right)$ is the Jacobi symbol defined above.

Proof. We use Lemma 3.2(1)(i). The first part is clear from (3.2). Write

$$N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = q^\ell + \sum_{h \in \mathbb{F}_q^*} R_{\ell,r}(h, hb, hc).$$

For each $h \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$, $R_{\ell,r}(h, hb, hc) = R_{\ell,r}(1, h_1 b, h_1^2 c)$ with $h_1 \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ such that $h_1^{q^r+1} = h$. If $\mathbf{T}_u(b) \notin \mathbb{F}_q^*$, then $\mathbf{T}_u(h_1 b) \neq 1$ and hence $R(h, hb, hc) = 0$ so that $N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = q^\ell$. Let $\mathbf{T}_u(b) \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$; then $\mathbf{T}_u(h_1 b) = 1$ if and only if $h_1 = \mathbf{T}_u(b)^{-1}$ so that

$$N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c) = q^\ell + R_{\ell,r}(1, h_1 b, h_1^2 c)$$

and the result follows. \square

We recall next some results regarding Gaussian sums over finite fields.

Lemma 3.4. *Let \mathbb{F}_q be the finite field of order $q = p^n$ with p a prime. Let η be the quadratic character of \mathbb{F}_q and let χ be the canonical additive character of \mathbb{F}_q . For $F \in \mathbb{F}_q$, let $\chi^F(h) := \chi(Fh)$, $h \in \mathbb{F}_q$.*

(i) *Set $G(\eta, \chi^F) := \sum_{h \in \mathbb{F}_q^*} \eta(h) \chi^F(h)$, then*

$$G(\eta, \chi^F) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } F = 0 \\ (-1)^{n-1} q^{1/2} \eta(F), & \text{if } F \neq 0, p \equiv 1 \pmod{4} \\ (-1)^{n-1} (-1)^{n/2} q^{1/2} \eta(F), & \text{if } F \neq 0, p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}. \end{cases}$$

(ii)

$$G(1, \chi^F) := \sum_{h \in \mathbb{F}_q^*} \chi^F(h) = \begin{cases} q-1, & \text{if } F = 0 \\ -1, & \text{if } F \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

Proof. (i) If $F = 0$, see [19, Thm. 5.4]. If $F \neq 0$, the result follows from Theorems 5.12(i), 5.15 in [19].

(ii) It follows from relation (5.8) in [19, p. 192]. \square

The following result is closely related to [8, Thm. 6.10].

Theorem 3.5. *Let*

(a) $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime $p > 2$;

- (b) ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$ such that ℓ/u is odd, where $u = \gcd(\ell, r)$;
- (c) $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$;
- (d) $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ be the trace map;
- (e) η_1 be the quadratic character of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ;
- (f) $f(x) = a^{q^r} x^{q^{2r}} + ax$ and $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be the solution of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$;
- (g) $c_1 = ax_0^{q^r+1} - c$.

There are two cases:

- (1) Let ℓ be odd. If $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0$, then $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise, $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is given by

$$q^\ell + \begin{cases} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta_1(a \mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4} \\ (-1)^{n(\ell+1)/2} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta_1(a \mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, b = 0 \\ (-1)^{n(3\ell+1)/2} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta_1(a \mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, b \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

- (2) Let ℓ be even. Then $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is given by

$$q^\ell + \begin{cases} (-1)q^{\ell/2}(q-1)\eta_1(a), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}, \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ q^{\ell/2}\eta_1(a), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}, \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0 \\ (-1)^{1+n\ell/2}q^{\ell/2}(q-1)\eta_1(a), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ (-1)^{n\ell/2}q^{\ell/2}\eta_1(a), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

Proof. Let η be the quadratic character of \mathbb{F}_q and χ be the canonical additive character of \mathbb{F}_q . By the transitivity property of trace maps, $\chi_1 = \chi \circ \mathbf{T}$. Concerning quadratic characters of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} and \mathbb{F}_q , for $h \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ we have $\eta_1(h) = \eta(h)$ if ℓ is odd; otherwise $\eta_1(h) = 1$.

Let ℓ be odd. Let $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$. Then, from (3.2) and Lemma 3.2(1),

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, 0, c) = q^\ell + (-1)^{n\ell-1} q^{\ell/2} \eta_1(a) G(\eta, \chi^F),$$

where $G(\eta, \chi^F)$ is the Gaussian sum in Lemma 3.4 with $F = \mathbf{T}(c_1)$. Now the result follows. The case $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ is similar.

Let ℓ be even. We use the Gaussian sum $G(1, \chi^F)$ in Lemma 3.4 and the result follows. \square

The following result is close to [8, Thm. 7.11].

Theorem 3.6. *Let*

- (a) $q = p^n$ be the power of a prime p ;
- (b) ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$ such that ℓ/u is even with $u = \gcd(\ell, r)$;
- (c) $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ be the trace map;
- (d) $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$;
- (e) $f(x) = a^{q^r} x^{q^{2r}} + ax$.

Suppose that $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has no roots in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . Then $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise, let $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be a root of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$. Set $c_1 = ax_0^{q^r+1} - c$.

(1) If $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , then

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell + \begin{cases} (-1)^{\ell/2u} q^{\ell/2} (q-1), & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ (-1)^{\ell/2u+1} q^{\ell/2}, & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

(2) If $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial, then

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell + \begin{cases} (-1)^{\ell/2u+1} q^{\ell/2+u} (q-1), & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ (-1)^{\ell/2u} q^{\ell/2+u}, & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

Proof. The first part follows from (3.2) and Lemma 3.2(2)(i). If $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} with x_0 as above, by (3.2) and Lemma 3.2(2)(ii) we have

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell + (-1)^{\ell/2u} q^{\ell/2} G(1, \chi^F)$$

with $F = \mathbf{T}(c_1)$ and the result follows from Lemma 3.4. If $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial, the proof is similar. \square

4. ON MAXIMAL ARTIN–SCHREIER CURVES

Let $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime p and let ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$. Let $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$. In Section 3 we computed the number $N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational affine points of the Artin–Schreier curve of type (3.1), namely

$$y^q - y = ax^{q^r+1} + bx + c.$$

This curve has exactly one singular point which is unbranched; thus the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of its nonsingular model over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , denoted by $\mathcal{X} = \mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$, is exactly

$$N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) + 1.$$

The Hasse–Weil bound (see [20, Thm. V.2.3], [15, Thm. 9.18]) asserts that

$$|\#\mathcal{X}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}) - (q^\ell + 1)| \leq 2gq^{\ell/2},$$

where g is the genus of the curve. Here we have $g = q^r(q-1)/2$; see, for example, [20, Prop. VI.4.1]). We are looking for examples of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal curves of type $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$, that is, those whose number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points attains the Hasse–Weil upper bound; equivalently, those curves such that

$$(4.1) \quad N_{\ell,r}(a, b, c) = q^\ell + q^{\ell/2+r}(q-1).$$

It follows then that $q^{\ell/2}$ must be an integer, that is, $n\ell$ must be an even integer. See [15, Ch. 10] for general results on maximal curves.

We consider two cases according to the parity of ℓ/u with $u := \gcd(\ell, r)$.

Case A: Suppose that ℓ/u is odd. If $p = 2$, Theorem 3.3 does not provide an example where (4.1) holds true. Let $p > 2$. Let $f(x)$ and c_1 be as in Theorem 3.5 (cf. Remark 3.1). If $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal, Theorem 3.5 implies that ℓ must be even, $r = 0$ and $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0$. Under these conditions, the curve $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,0}(a, b, c)$ is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal if and only if either $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ and a is not a square in $\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$; or $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$, $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ is a square and $n\ell/2$ is odd; or $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$, $a \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ is not a square and $n\ell/2$ is even.

Case B: Suppose that ℓ/u is even. Thus $r \geq 1$. By Theorem 3.6 a necessary condition to have (4.1) is that $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has a root in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} and $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0$, where $f(x)$ and c_1 are as in Case A above. Under these conditions, $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal if and only if $u = \gcd(\ell, r) = r$ and $\ell/(2u)$ is odd.

We summarize the above computations in the following.

Theorem 4.1. *Let*

- (a) $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime p ;
- (b) ℓ and r be integers with $\ell \geq 2$ and $r \geq 0$;
- (c) $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ be the trace map;
- (d) $a, b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$, $a \neq 0$;
- (e) $f(x) = a^{q^r} x^{q^{2r}} + ax$.

Let $\mathcal{X} = \mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ be the nonsingular model of the Artin–Schreier curve of type (3.1) over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . If \mathcal{X} is a \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal curve, then the following conditions must be satisfied:

- (i) $n\ell$ is even;
- (ii) *The equation $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has a solution $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ such that $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0$, where $c_1 = ax_0^{q^{r+1}} - c$.*

Conversely, if these conditions are satisfied then \mathcal{X} is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal if and only if one of the following conditions hold true:

- (1) $r = 0$, ℓ even, $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$, and a is not a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ;
- (2) $r = 0$, ℓ even, $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$, and either $n\ell/2$ odd and a is a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , or $n\ell/2$ even and a is not a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ;
- (3) $r \geq 1$, $2r$ divides ℓ such that $\ell/2r$ is odd, $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} .

Remark 4.2. Under conditions (i), (ii) of Theorem 4.1, the curve $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -minimal (in the sense that the lower Hasse–Weil bound above is attained) if and only if one of the following conditions hold true:

- (1') $r = 0$, ℓ even, $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$, and a is a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ;

- (2') $r = 0$, ℓ even, $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$, and either $n\ell/2$ odd and a is not a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , or $n\ell/2$ even and a is a square in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} ;
 (3') $r \geq 1$, $2r$ divides ℓ such that $\ell/2r$ is even, $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} .

Remark 4.3. There are examples of maximal curves for each case in Theorem 4.1; cf. [8, Thm. 3.3], [21, Thm. 1].

Remark 4.4. The notation is as in Theorem 4.1. Let $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ and $n\ell/2$ be odd. If a is a nonzero square, then $\mathcal{X} = \mathcal{X}_{\ell,0}(a, b, c)$ can be defined by an equation of type

$$y^q - y = x^2 + c',$$

where $c' \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$. Since the solution in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} of $f(x) = 2x = 0$ is $x_0 = 0$, by Theorem 4.1 $\mathbf{T}(c') = 0$ and thus \mathcal{X} is uniquely defined by

$$y^q - y = x^2.$$

This example is missing in [8, Thm. 8.12] and it is a particular case in [21, Thm. 1].

Remark 4.5. Let $\mathcal{X} = \mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(a, b, c)$ be a \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -maximal curve satisfying Theorem 4.1(3) with $\ell = 2r$. Then by [9, Thm. 2.3] \mathcal{X} is \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -isomorphic to a curve of type $\mathcal{X}_{\ell,r}(\alpha, 0, 0)$, where $f(x) = \alpha^{q^r} x^{q^{2r}} + \alpha x$ is not a permutation polynomial. We may choose $\alpha = 1$ if $p = 2$; otherwise $\alpha = \zeta^{(q^r+1)/2}$, ζ a generator of $\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}^*$ [8, Prop. 3.2].

Remark 4.6. Çakçak and Özbudak [4] considered maximal curves that include those studied by Coulter [8]; in particular, they show that these examples are covered by Hermitian curves. As a matter of fact, there are maximal curves which are not covered by Hermitian curves; cf. [11]. Are maximal curves in (3.1) with $\mathbf{T}(c) = 0$ isomorphic to Coulter's curves? Is a maximal curve in (3.1) with $\mathbf{T}(c) \neq 0$ isomorphic to a curve in [4]? Must such a curve be covered by the Hermitian curve?

5. THE ARC ARISING FROM \mathcal{H}

Throughout this section we let $q = p^n$ be a power of a prime p , ℓ an integer with $\ell \geq 3$, and $r = r(\ell)$ be the integer defined in (2.1); in particular, $u = \gcd(\ell, r) = 1$. We are interested in the arc property derived from the pointset

$$\mathcal{K} = \mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}) \subseteq PG(2, q^\ell)$$

defined from the set of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of the curve \mathcal{H} introduced in Section 2. By Theorem 2.1, \mathcal{K} is an (N, d) -arc with parameters

$$(5.1) \quad N = q^{2\ell-1} + 1 \quad \text{and} \quad d = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1}.$$

By (2.2), the degree d of the arc is also closely related to the number $N_\ell(b, c) := N_{\ell,r}(1, b, c)$ of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points of Artin–Schreier curves of type (2.3), namely

$$y^q - y = x^{q^r+1} + bx + c,$$

where $b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$. We have $N_\ell(b, c) \leq qd$. The numbers $N_\ell(b, c)$ can be deduced directly from Theorems 3.3, 3.5, 3.6 above. For the sake of convenience we explicitly state such computations below.

Lemma 5.1. *Consider the same notation as above; in particular, $q = p^n$ with p a prime and ℓ is an integer with $\ell \geq 3$, $b, c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$. In addition, let $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ be the trace map and let χ_1 be the canonical additive character of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . Let $f(x) = x^{q^{2r}} + x$ with r as in (2.1).*

(1) *Suppose that ℓ is odd.*

(i) *Let $p = 2$. If $\mathbf{T}(b) = 0$, then $N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise,*

$$N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell + \chi_1(\omega^{q^r+1} + \omega) \left(\frac{2}{\ell}\right)^n q^{(\ell+1)/2} \chi_1(\mathbf{T}(b)^{-2} c),$$

where $\omega \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is such that $b \mathbf{T}(b)^{-1} = \omega^{q^{2r}} + \omega + 1$, and $\left(\frac{2}{v}\right)$ is the Jacobi symbol.

(ii) *Let $p > 2$. Let x_0 be the solution of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ (cf. Remark 3.1). Let η be the quadratic character of \mathbb{F}_q . Set $c_1 = ax_0^{q^r+1} - c$. If $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0$, then $N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise,*

$$N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell + \begin{cases} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta(\mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4} \\ (-1)^{n(\ell+1)/2} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta(\mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, b = 0 \\ (-1)^{n(3\ell+1)/2} q^{(\ell+1)/2} \eta(\mathbf{T}(c_1)), & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, b \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

(2) *Suppose that ℓ is even. If $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$ has no roots in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , then $N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell$; otherwise, let $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be a root of $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$. Set $c_1 = ax_0^{q^r+1} - c$.*

(i) *If $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} , then*

$$N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell + \begin{cases} (-1)^{\ell/2} q^{\ell/2} (q-1), & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ (-1)^{\ell/2+1} q^{\ell/2}, & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

(ii) *If $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial, then*

$$N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell + \begin{cases} (-1)^{\ell/2+1} q^{\ell/2+1} (q-1), & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) = 0 \\ (-1)^{\ell/2} q^{\ell/2+1}, & \text{if } \mathbf{T}(c_1) \neq 0. \end{cases}$$

Next we are concerned with the permutation property of the polynomial $f(x)$ which arises in the lemma above.

Remark 5.2. Let $f(x) = x^{q^{2r}} + x \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}[x]$ with q a power of a prime p , ℓ an integer with $\ell \geq 3$, and r as in (2.1). If $p = 2$, it is clear that $f(x)$ is not a permutation polynomial. If $p > 2$, then Remark 3.1 can be improved so that $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial if and only if either ℓ is odd, or $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$; see the remark after the proof of Theorem 4.1 in [5].

Recall that N , d and r stand for the integers defined in (5.1) and (2.1).

Question 5.3. Is the pointset $\mathcal{K} = \mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$ defined above a complete (N, d) -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$?

Case A: The answer to Question 5.3 is affirmative provided that $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ and ℓ is odd with $\ell \geq 3$.

In fact, let $P \in PG(2, q^\ell) \setminus \mathcal{K}$. We shall show that there is a line $\mathcal{L} : y + bx + c = 0$ in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ such that $P \in \mathcal{L}$ and $\#\mathcal{K} \cap \mathcal{L} = d$. If $P = (A : B : 1)$, we look for \mathcal{L} with $c = -bA - B$ (so that $P \in \mathcal{L}$). Let us consider the Artin-Schreier curve of type

$$y^q - y = x^{q^{r+1}} - Ax^{q^r} - Ax^{q^{r-1}} + B - \lambda,$$

where $\lambda \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is such that $\mathbf{T}(\lambda)$ is a nonzero square in \mathbb{F}_q . As already mentioned in Section 3 (cf. [8, Thm. 5.8]), this curve has the same number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points as a certain curve of type (3.1). Thus, by Lemma 5.1(1)(ii), the curve above has at least $q^\ell - q^r$ \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points; let (x_0, y_0) be one of such points and set $b := -x_0^{q^r} - x_0^{q^{r-1}}$. Then

$$-b^{q^r} = x_0^{q^{2r}} + x_0^{q^{2r-1}},$$

and thus x_0 is also the solution of the equation $f(x) = -b^{q^r}$, with $f(x) = x^{q^{2r}} + x$, as $2r - 1 = \ell$. Moreover, by construction,

$$c_1 = x_0^{q^{r+1}} - c = x_0^{q^{r+1}} + bA + B = x_0^{q^{r+1}} - Ax_0^{q^r} - Ax_0^{q^{r-1}} + B;$$

so $\mathbf{T}(c_1) = \mathbf{T}(\lambda)$ is a nonzero square in \mathbb{F}_q . The result follows from Lemma 5.1(1)(ii) and (2.2). Now let $P = (1 : B : 0)$. Here we look for a line of type $\mathcal{L} : y - Bx + c = 0$ with some $c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$. Let $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be a solution of $f(x) = B^{q^r}$ (cf. Remark 5.2) and let c be such that $\mathbf{T}(x_0^{q^{r+1}} - c)$ is a nonzero square in \mathbb{F}_q ; the result follows.

Case B: The answer to Question 5.3 is also affirmative if $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ and ℓ is odd with $\ell \geq 3$. The proof is similar to Case A and here we choose $\lambda \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ according to the parity of either $n(\ell + 1)/2$ or $n(3\ell + 1)/2$.

Case C: Let $p > 2$ and ℓ be even with $\ell \geq 6$ and $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$. Then the answer to Question 5.3 is negative.

In fact, here \mathcal{K} is a complete (N, d_1) -arc with $d_1 = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-3}$ (which is clearly less than the degree d of \mathcal{H}). To see this, let \mathcal{L} be a line in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ defined by the equation $\alpha X + \beta Y + \gamma Z = 0$. We claim that $\#\mathcal{K} \cap \mathcal{L} \leq d_1$. If $\beta = 0$, then it is easy to see that $\#\mathcal{K} \cap \mathcal{L} \leq q^{\ell-1}$. For $\beta \neq 0$, the claim follows from Lemma 5.1(2)(i) as $\ell/2 = r - 2$ and $f(x)$ is a permutation polynomial (see Remark 5.2).

Now we prove the completeness of the (N, d_1) -arc \mathcal{K} . The proof is similar to Case A. Let $P \in PG(2, q^\ell) \setminus \mathcal{K}$. If $P = (A : B : 1)$, we look for a line $\mathcal{L} : y + bx + c = 0$ such that $c = -bA - B$ and $\#\mathcal{K} \cap \mathcal{L} = d_1$. Let us consider the Artin–Schreier curve of type

$$y^q - y = x^{q^r+1} - Ax^{q^r} - Ax^{q^{r-4}} + B - \lambda,$$

where $\lambda \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ is such that $\mathbf{T}(\lambda) \neq 0$. We see that this curve has at least $q^\ell - q^{r-2}(q - 1)$ \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -affine points. Let (x_0, y_0) be one of these points, and let $b := -x_0^{q^r} - x_0^{q^{r-4}}$. Therefore $f(x_0) = -b^{q^r}$ since $2r - 4 = \ell$. Also, by construction, $\mathbf{T}(x_0^{q^r+1} - c) = \mathbf{T}(\lambda) \neq 0$. Now the result follows from Lemma 5.1(2)(i) and (2.2). Finally, let $P = (1 : B : 0)$ and $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be a solution of $f(x) = B^{q^r}$ (cf. Remark 5.2); choose $c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ such that $\mathbf{T}(x_0^{q^r+1} - c) \neq 0$. Then the line $\mathcal{L} : y - Bx + c = 0$ is such that $P \in \mathcal{L}$ and $\#\mathcal{K} \cap \mathcal{L} = d_1$ by Lemma 5.1(2)(i).

Case D₁: Let $p = 2$ and ℓ be odd with $\ell \geq 3$. We assume $q = 2^n$ with n even; otherwise, we assume n odd and $\ell \equiv \pm 1 \pmod{8}$. Here the answer to Question 5.3 is also negative.

In fact, let us consider the following set:

$$\bar{\mathcal{K}} := \{(1 : B : 0) \in PG(2, q^\ell) : \mathbf{T}(B) = 0\}.$$

We claim that the pointset

$$\mathcal{K}_1 := \mathcal{K} \cup \bar{\mathcal{K}}$$

is a complete (N_1, d) -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ with $N_1 = N + q^{\ell-1}$. That \mathcal{K}_1 is an (N_1, d) -arc is clear by Lemma 5.1(1)(i); next we prove its completeness. Let $P \in PG(2, \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}) \setminus \mathcal{K}_1$.

If $P = (A : B : 1)$, we look for a line $\mathcal{L} : y + bx + c = 0$ with $c = -bA - B$ such that $\#\mathcal{K}_1 \cap \mathcal{L} = d$. Let $\gamma \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ and consider the Artin–Schreier curve of type

$$y^q - y = x^{q^r+1} + x - (x^q + x + 1)A\gamma^{-1} - B\gamma^{-2}.$$

Arguing as in Case A, we can see that this curve has at least one affine \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -point, say (x_0, y_0) . We let $b := (x_0^{q^{2r}} + x_0 + 1)\gamma$. Then, as $2r = \ell + 1$ and

$p = 2$, $\mathbf{T}(b) = \gamma$ so that $b\mathbf{T}(b)^{-1} = x_0^{q^{2r}} + x_0 + 1$. After some computation,

$$x_0^{q^r+1} + x_0 + \mathbf{T}(b)^{-2}c = y_0^q - y_0$$

and, by the transitivity of the trace map,

$$N_\ell(b, c) = q^\ell + \left(\frac{2}{\ell}\right)^n q^r$$

by Lemma 5.1(1)(i); the result follows. Now let $P = (1 : B : 0)$ with $\mathbf{T}(B) \neq 0$. We look for a line $\mathcal{L} : y - Bx + c = 0$ with $\#\mathcal{K}_1 \cap \mathcal{L} = d$. Let $\omega \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ be such that $B\mathbf{T}(B)^{-1} = \omega^{q^{2r}} + \omega + 1$ (see Remark 3.1). Define $c = (\omega^{q^r+1} + \omega)\mathbf{T}(B)^2$. Then

$$\omega^{q^r+1} + \omega + c\mathbf{T}(B)^{-2} = 0,$$

and the result follows again from Lemma 5.1(1)(i).

Case D₂: Let $p = 2$ and ℓ be odd with $\ell \geq 3$. We assume $q = 2^n$ with n odd and $\ell \equiv \pm 3 \pmod{8}$. Here the answer to Question 5.3 is also negative.

In fact, let us consider the set

$$\bar{\mathcal{K}} := \{(1 : B : 0) \in PG(2, q^\ell) : \mathbf{T}(B) \neq 0\}.$$

We claim that the pointset

$$\mathcal{K}_1 := \mathcal{K} \cup \bar{\mathcal{K}}$$

is in fact a complete $(N_1, q^{\ell-1})$ -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ with $N_1 = N + q^\ell - q^{\ell-1}$. That \mathcal{K}_1 is an $(N_1, q^{\ell-1})$ -arc is clear. To see its completeness, let $P \in PG(2, q^\ell) \setminus \mathcal{K}_1$. Let $P = (A : B : 1)$ and let \mathcal{L} be the line $y + bx + c = 0$ with $c = -bA - B$ so that $P \in \mathcal{L}$; if we let $\mathbf{T}(b) = 0$, then $\#\mathcal{K}_1 \cap \mathcal{L} = q^{\ell-1}$ by Lemma 5.1(1)(i). Now let $P = (1 : B : 0)$ with $\mathbf{T}(B) = 0$; here we let \mathcal{L} be the line $y - Bx = 0$ and the result follows by Lemma 5.1(1)(i) again.

Case E: Let $p \geq 2$ be a prime and ℓ be even with $\ell \geq 4$ and $\ell \equiv 0 \pmod{4}$. Here the answer to Question 5.3 is also negative.

In fact, set $f(x) = x^{q^{2r}} + x$ and let H be the set of elements $B \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ such that the equation $f(x) = B^{q^r}$ has a solution in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . Let us fix a set $H_1 \subseteq \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \setminus H$ with $\#H_1 = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1} - 1$; this selection of H_1 is possible since $\#H \leq q^{\ell-2}$. Then the pointset

$$\mathcal{K}_2 := \mathcal{K} \cup \{(1 : B : 0) \in PG(2, q^\ell) : B \in H_1\}$$

is a complete (N_2, d) -arc, with $N_2 = N + \#H_1 = q^{2\ell-1} + q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1}$.

Arguing as in Case C, it is easy to see that \mathcal{K}_2 is in fact an (N_2, d) -arc. To derive its completeness, let $P \in PG(2, q^\ell) \setminus \mathcal{K}_2$. If $P = (A : B : 1)$, we proceed as in Case C by means of Remark 5.2 and Lemma 5.1(2)(ii). Let now $P = (1 : B : 0)$ with $B \in H$, and $x_0 \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ a solution for $f(x) = B^{q^r}$.

Let $c \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}$ such that $\mathbf{T}(x_0^{q^r+1} - c) \neq 0$ and consider the line $y - Bx + c = 0$; the result follows.

Case F: Let $p = 2$ and ℓ be even with $\ell \geq 4$ and $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$. In this case, the answer to Question 5.3 is also negative.

In fact, let H be the set defined in Case E and let us fix a set $H_2 \subseteq \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \setminus H$ such that $\#H_2 = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1) - 1$. Then the pointset

$$\mathcal{K}_3 := \mathcal{K} \cup \{(1 : B : 0) : B \in H_2\}$$

is a complete (N_3, d_2) -arc with

$$N_3 = N + \#H_2 = q^{2\ell-1} + q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1), \quad d_2 = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1).$$

The proof of this case is analogous to Case E by using Lemma 5.1(2)(ii) once again.

We summarize the above computations in the following.

Theorem 5.4. *Let \mathcal{H} be the plane curve over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} defined in Section 2, where $q = p^n$ is a power of a prime $p \geq 2$ and ℓ is an integer with $\ell \geq 3$. Let $\mathcal{K} = \mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}) \subseteq PG(2, q^\ell)$ be the set of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points of \mathcal{H} . Let $N = \#\mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}) = q^{2\ell-1} + 1$ and $d = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1}$ be the number of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} -rational points and the degree of \mathcal{H} , where r is the integer defined in (2.1).*

- (1) *If $p > 2$ and ℓ is odd, then \mathcal{K} is a complete (N, d) -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$;*
- (2) *If $p > 2$ and ℓ is even with $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$, then \mathcal{K} is a complete (N, d_1) -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$ with $d_1 = q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-3}$;*
- (3) *Let $p = 2$ and ℓ be odd. Suppose that n is even or $\ell \equiv \pm 1 \pmod{8}$. Let us define the set $\bar{\mathcal{K}} := \{(1 : B : 0) \in PG(2, q^\ell) : \mathbf{T}(B) = 0\}$, being $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ the trace map. Then the pointset*

$$\mathcal{K}_1 := \mathcal{K} \cup \bar{\mathcal{K}}$$

is a complete (N_1, d) -arc, with $N_1 = N + q^{\ell-1}$;

- (4) *Let $p = 2$ and ℓ be odd. Suppose that n is odd and $\ell \equiv \pm 3 \pmod{8}$. Let us define the set $\bar{\mathcal{K}} := \{(1 : B : 0) \in PG(2, q^\ell) : \mathbf{T}(B) \neq 0\}$, being $\mathbf{T} : \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_q$ the trace map. Then the pointset*

$$\mathcal{K}_1 := \mathcal{K} \cup \bar{\mathcal{K}}$$

is a complete $(N_1, q^{\ell-1})$ -arc, with $N_1 = N + q^\ell - q^{\ell-1}$;

Set $H := \{B \in \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell} : x^{q^{2r}} + x = B^{q^r} \text{ has a solution in } \mathbb{F}_{q^\ell}\}$.

- (5) *Let $p \geq 2$ and ℓ be even with $\ell \equiv 0 \pmod{4}$. Let H_1 be a subset of the complement of H in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} whose size is $q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1} - 1$. Then the pointset*

$$\mathcal{K}_2 = \mathcal{K} \cup \{(1 : B : 0) : B \in H_1\}$$

is a complete $(q^{2\ell-1} + q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1}, d)$ -arc;

- (6) Let $p = 2$, and ℓ be even with $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$. Let H_2 be a subset of the complement of H in \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} whose size is $q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1) - 1$. Then the pointset

$$\mathcal{K}_3 = \mathcal{K} \cup \{(1 : B : 0) : B \in H_2\}$$

is a complete $(q^{2\ell-1} + q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1), q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-2}(q-1))$ -arc.

Remark 5.5. Let q be a power of an odd prime and ℓ be a positive even integer. Let B be a subset of $\mathbb{F}_{q^{\ell/2}}^*$ of size b with $1 \leq b \leq b^{\ell/2-1}$. In [12] the following union of Hermitian curves over \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ}

$$\mathcal{X}_B : \prod_{\lambda \in B} (\lambda X^{q^{\ell/2+1}} + XY^{q^{\ell/2}} + X^{q^{\ell/2}}Y + Z^{q^{\ell/2+1}}) = 0$$

is considered. The pointset $\mathcal{X}_B(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$ is a complete $(q^\ell q^{\ell/2}b+1, b(q^{\ell/2}+1))$ -arc; in particular, if $b = q^{\ell/2-1}$ we obtain a complete $(q^{2\ell-1} + 1, q^{\ell-1} + q^{\ell/2-1})$ -arc in $PG(2, q^\ell)$. For $\ell \geq 6$ and $\ell \equiv 2 \pmod{4}$, this arc has the same parameters as the arc $\mathcal{K} = \mathcal{H}(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$ in Theorem 5.4(2). However, these arcs are not isomorphic. In fact, if they were so there would exist a collineation T on $PG(2, q^\ell)$ such that $T(\mathcal{K}) = \mathcal{X}_B(\mathbb{F}_{q^\ell})$. By Bézout's Theorem there are at most $(q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-1})(q^{\ell-1} + q^{r-3})$ points in the intersection of \mathcal{H} and \mathcal{X}_B , which is a contradiction as $\#\mathcal{K} = q^{2\ell-1} + 1$.

Remark 5.6. The construction of the arcs in Theorem 5.4(5)(6) seem to be not canonical in the sense that it might depend of the selection of certain subsets of \mathbb{F}_{q^ℓ} . As a matter of fact, we even do not know if the smallest case $q = 2$ and $\ell = 4$ would provided with at least two non-isomorphic complete $(140, 12)$ -arcs in $PG(2, 16)$.

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